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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the role of the advisor in relation to teachers when a major curriculum change is made in a school. Twenty specific suggestions are made to guide the advisor in performing the task of helping teachers adjust to new situations and different approaches or methods of teaching. Two vital points are made on the subject of handling changing situations. First, imposed change, whether from outside the system or from outside the classroom, is seldom effective or enduring. Real growth arises from the needs and aspirations of individual teachers and administrators, supported by and responsive to the community they serve. Second, persons serving in advisory roles can facilitate change only if they are available to work with school staffs and their right to be there is clearly established by the school system. A relationship of trust and mutual support between teachers and advisors is the key to successful change. (JD)

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The Advisor: Supportive Assistance For Effective Changes In Education

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Whenever a major curriculum change is introduced into a school or classroom, the teachers who are involved need help. If the change involves the use of a new textbook or a revision in the prescribed syllabus, the assistance can usually be provided through an appropriate orientation, after which most teachers can be expected to follow the new program more or less on their own. Orientation courses and occasional briefings by supervisory personnel are probably the most common traditional methods for introducing teachers to new programs.

Truly effective change in education requires a different approach from that usually involved in supervision. Whether for example, teachers are going to be required to operate within a broader framework, such as in open settings, or to structure their classroom programs to better meet the needs and interests of their particular children, they need far more than initial orientation and intermittent briefings. They need the assurance of continuing and timely support as they respond to the unfolding requirements and opportunities of their classrooms. During the period when they are learning to work in new ways their requirements for support are especially great. During this period there are many situations outside the classroom that also urgently demand attention. Basic changes in educational practices in the classroom can only occur within a broader context of change. The school, the school system, and the community must become involved in positive ways.

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The teacher advisor, acting in a supportive mode can help teachers smoothly make transitions from older programs to the newer ones with minimum anxiety and distress. Perhaps the clearest way to suggest the variety and complexity of factors affecting change in developing situations is to summarize briefly some specific activities that might engage teacher advisors in their efforts to support the teaching staff.

1. Conducting orientation courses for teachers and administrators in the new programs, curriculum , or philosophical orientation, and in techniques for making them work.

2. Visiting classrooms on a regular basis (hopefully four or more advisor-days per month at each site, advisors working in pairs).

3. Conducting teacher workshops within the context of newly adopted programs.

4. Conducting informal teacher seminars dealing with various aspects of children's learning and with problems of classroom organization and procedure.

5. Conducting seminars for teacher-aides and community helpers.

6. Conducting evening programs for parents, including film and slide presentations, and classroom workshops in which the parents have a chance to explore, understand, and contribute to the learning materials available for their children.

7. Arranging for outside consultant services in response to specific needs and requests.

8. Carrying on a continuing dialogue with individual teachers about their own situations, working out with each one some appropriate next steps for the development of the classroom.

9. Writing letters to teachers as follow-up to oral discussions. Such letters typically contain suggestions custom-tailored to individual needs and capabilities.

10. Providing books, pamphlets, and articles in response to general need and as part of continuing in-service education.

11. Providing special curriculum materials on a custom-tailored basis.

12. Providing assistance to teachers in securing free and inexpensive materials to enrich the classroom environment.

13. Developing learning materials, often in response to particular classroom needs, and often from ideas that originate in the classroom.

14. Developing prototypes of various kinds of instructional equipment and attempting to arrange for their replication in quantities needed for classroom use.

15. Providing the facilities of a design laboratory so that a teacher's promising idea for a piece of classroom equipment can be developed.

16. Trying to arrange for adequate discretionary funds to be made available to teachers, so that small purchases of materials can be made in response to needs as they arise. Teachers should not need to pay for the "extras" out of their own pockets, since these "extras" are so often essential.

17. Arranging for teachers to visit each other's classes, both within and between school systems.

18. Developing a communications system based on printed material: for example, classroom vignettes of children's learning; brief commentaries on the use of learning materials; monographs dealing with learning and curriculum; and extracts from worthy books and articles on education.

19. Establishing advisory councils of teachers and administration which make decisions in regard to organizing for instruction, program, materials, and general school policies.

20. Establishing and maintaining communication and working relationships with appropriate administrators in order to gain support for teachers and the program in general.

This partial listing of activities should help illuminate three aspects of a instructional support concept utilizing persons in helping roles who have advisory skills and talents: 1) strategy for change; 2) the advisor's mode of working; and 3) the functions of a comprehensive support service.

There are two vital points to be made. First, imposed change, whether from outside the system or from outside the classroom, is seldom effective or enduring. Real growth arises from the needs and aspirations of individual teachers and administrators, supported by and responsive to the community they serve. The strategy is to

work in places and with individuals who are ready for change, who have even a partial sense of the directions in which they want to move, and who need and request support and advice. Advisors should go only where they are invited, and the relationship must always be one of mutual trust. Teachers who request advisory support represent "growth points" in the process of change. As these teachers are deliberately trying to push back the frontiers of their own knowledge about effective ways of working with children, the spirit of their dialogue may tend to infect other teachers and administrators and parents, creating a climate in which worthy ideas spread.

Second, persons serving in advisory roles can facilitate change only if they are available to work with school staffs and they can be available only if their right to exist is clearly established by their school system. They need not necessarily be a part of the system, but their status and function must be firmly desired and endorsed by the school authorities.

The advisory relationship with teachers and administrators is based on shared values about the way children should be educated. Within broad areas of agreement, the advisor should not attempt to impose specific ideas, and should not try to sell ready-made programs, "packages", or methods. On the contrary, the role is seen to be one of responding to the demands of the situation. The advisor ought not tell people what they should do, but try to extend what they are capable of doing by perceiving what can be changed in a particular situtation, and by determining strengths that can be built upon. Being sensitive to the stages of growth in a school environment, advisors can support the delicate fabric of change that is in the process of being woven.

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